

SUBCHAPTER C : RATEMAKING APPEALS

§291.41. Appeal of Ratemaking Pursuant to the Texas Water Code, §13.043.

(a) Any party to a rate proceeding before the governing body of a municipality may appeal the decision of the governing body to the commission. This subsection does not apply to a municipally-owned utility, but does include privately-owned utilities operating within the corporate limits of a municipality. An appeal under this subsection may be initiated by filing with the commission a petition signed by a responsible official of the party to the rate proceeding or its authorized representative and accompanied by the filing fee as required by the Texas Water Code, §5.235 and by serving a copy of the petition on all parties to the original proceeding. The appeal must be initiated within 90 days after the date of notice of the final decision of the governing body.

(b) An appeal under the Texas Water Code, §13.043(b) must be initiated within 90 days after the effective day of the rate change or, if appealing under subdivision 13.043(b)(2) or (5), within 90 days after the date on which the governing body of the municipality or affected county makes a final decision. An appeal is initiated by filing an original and four copies of a petition for review with the commission and by filing a copy of the petition with the entity providing service and with the governing body whose decision is being appealed if it is not the entity providing service. The petition must be signed by the lesser of 10,000 or 10% of the ratepayers whose rates have been changed and who are eligible to appeal under subsection (c) of this section.

(c) Retail ratepayers of the following entities may appeal the decision of the governing body of the entity affecting their water or sewer utility rates to the commission:

(1) a nonprofit water supply or sewer service corporation created and operating under Chapter 76, Acts of the 43rd Legislature, 1st Called Session, 1933 (Article 1434a, Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes);

(2) a utility under the jurisdiction of a municipality inside the corporate limits of the municipality;

(3) a municipally owned utility, if the ratepayers reside outside the corporate limits of the municipality;

(4) a district or authority created under the Texas Constitution, Article III, §52, or Article XVI, §59, that provides water or sewer service to household users; and

(5) a utility owned by an affected county, if the ratepayer's rates are actually or may be adversely affected. For the purposes of this subchapter, ratepayers who reside outside the boundaries of the district or authority shall be considered a separate class from ratepayers who reside inside those boundaries.

(d) In an appeal under Texas Water Code, Subsection 13.043(b), each person receiving a separate bill is considered a ratepayer, but one person may not be considered more than one ratepayer regardless of the number of bills the person receives. The petition for review is considered properly signed if signed by a person, or the spouse of the person, in whose name utility service is carried.

(e) The commission shall hear an appeal under this section de novo and fix in its final order the rates the governing body should have fixed in the action from which the appeal was taken. The commission may:

(1) in an appeal under the Texas Water Code §13.043(a), include reasonable expenses incurred in the appeal proceedings;

(2) in an appeal under the Texas Water Code §13.043(b), included reasonable expenses incurred by the retail public utility in the appeal proceedings;

(3) establish the effective date;

(4) order refunds or allow surcharges to recover lost revenues;

(5) consider only the information that was available to the governing body at the time the governing body made its decision and evidence of reasonable expenses incurred in the appeal proceedings;

(6) establish interim rates to be in effect until a final decision is made.

(f) A retail public utility that receives water or sewer service from another retail public utility or political subdivision of the state, including an affected county, may appeal to the commission, a decision of the provider of water or sewer service affecting the amount paid for water or sewer service. An appeal under this subsection must be initiated within 90 days after notice of the decision is received from the provider of the service by filing a petition by the retail public utility and accompanied by the filing fee as required by the Texas Water Code, §5.235.

(g) An applicant requesting service from an affected county or a water supply or sewer service corporation may appeal to the commission a decision of the county or water supply or sewer service corporation affecting the amount to be paid to obtain service other than the regular membership or tap fees. An appeal under Texas Water Code, §13.043(g) must be initiated within 90 days after written notice of the amount to be paid to obtain service is provided to the service applicant or member of the decision of an affected county or water supply or sewer service corporation affecting the amount to be paid to obtain service as requested in the applicant's initial request for that service. The appeal must be accompanied by a \$100 filing fee as required by the Texas Water Code, §5.235.

(1) The executive director may, if requested by the applicant, establish an interim charge for connecting service. If the applicant pays the charges determined by the executive director, the corporation or affected county shall provide service to the applicant pending final disposition of the appeal.

(2) If the commission finds the amount charged to be clearly unreasonable, it shall establish the fee to be paid and shall establish conditions for the applicant to pay any amounts due to the affected county or water supply or sewer service corporation. Unless otherwise ordered, any portion of the charges paid by the applicant which exceed the amount determined in the commission's order shall be repaid to the applicant with interest at a rate determined by the commission within 30 days of the signing of the order.

(3) In an appeal brought under this subsection, the commission shall affirm the decision of the water supply or sewer service corporation if the amount paid by the applicant or demanded by the water supply or sewer service corporation is consistent with the tariff of the water supply or sewer service corporation and is reasonably related to the cost of installing on-site and off-site facilities to provide service to that applicant, in addition to the factors specified under subsection (i) of this section.

(4) A determination made by the commission on an appeal from an applicant for service from a water supply or sewer service corporation under this subsection is binding on all similarly situated applicants for service, and the commission may not consider other appeals on the same issue until the applicable provisions of the tariff of the water supply or sewer service corporation are amended.

(h) The commission may, on a motion by the executive director or by the appellant under subsection (a), (b), or (f) of this section, establish interim rates to be in effect until a final decision is made.

(i) In an appeal under this section, the commission shall ensure that every rate made, demanded, or received by any retail public utility or by any two or more retail public utilities jointly shall be just and reasonable. Rates shall not be unreasonably preferential, prejudicial, or discriminatory but shall be sufficient, equitable, and consistent in application to each class of customers. The commission shall use a methodology that preserves the financial integrity of the retail public utility.

Adopted December 6, 1995

Effective January 10, 1996

§291.42. Contents of Petition Seeking Review of Rates Pursuant to the Texas Water Code, §13.043(b).

(a) Petitions for review of rate actions filed pursuant to the Texas Water Code, §13.043(b), shall contain the original petition for review with the required signatures. Each signature page of a petition should contain in legible form the following information for each signatory ratepayer:

(1) a clear and concise statement that the petition is an appeal of a specific rate action of the water or sewer service supplier in question as well as a concise description and date of that rate action;

(2) the name, telephone number, and street or rural route address (post office box numbers are not sufficient) of each signatory ratepayer. The petition shall list the address of the location where service is received if it differs from the residential address of the signatory ratepayer;

(3) the effective date of the decision being appealed;

(4) the basis of the request for review of rates; and

(5) any other information the commission may require.

(b) A petition must be received from a total of 10,000 or 10% of the ratepayers whose rates have been changed and who are eligible to appeal, whichever is less.

(c) A filing fee is not required for appeals or complaints filed under the Texas Water Code, §13.043(b).

§291.43. Refunds During Pendency of Appeal.

A utility which is appealing the action of the governing body of a municipality under the Texas Water Code, §13.043, shall not be required to make refunds of any over-collections during the pendency of the appeal.

§291.44. Contents of Pleadings Seeking Review of Rates for Sales of Water Under the Texas Water Code, §§11.036-11.041 and 12.013.

(a) Ratepayers seeking relief under the Texas Water Code, §§11.036-11.041 and 12.013 should include in a written petition to the commission, the following information:

(1) the petitioner's name;

(2) the name of the water supplier from which water supply service is received or sought;

(3) the specific section of the Code under which petitioner seeks relief, with an explanation of why petitioner is entitled to receive or use the water;

(4) that the petitioner is willing and able to pay a just and reasonable price for the water;

(5) that the party owning or controlling the water supply has water not contracted to others and available for the petitioner's use; and

(6) that the party owning or controlling the water supply fails or refuses to supply the available water to the petitioner, or that the price or rental demanded for the available water is not just and reasonable or is discriminatory.

(b) Water suppliers seeking relief under the Texas Water Code, §§11.036-11.041 and 12.013, should include in a written petition for relief to the commission, the following information:

- (1) petitioner's name;
- (2) the name of the ratepayers to whom water supply service is rendered;
- (3) the specific section of the Code under which petitioner seeks relief, with an explanation of why petitioner is entitled to the relief requested;
- (4) that the petitioner is willing and able to supply water at a just and reasonable price; and
- (5) that the price demanded by petitioner for the water is just and reasonable and is not discriminatory.

(c) If the petition for relief is accompanied by the deposit stipulated in the Code, the executive director shall have a preliminary investigation of allegations contained in the petition made and determine whether or not there are probable grounds for the complaint alleged in the petition. The commission may require the petitioner to make an additional deposit or execute a bond satisfactory to the commission in an amount fixed by the commission.

(d) If, after preliminary investigation, the executive director determines that probable grounds exist for the complaint alleged in the petition, the commission shall enter an order setting a time and place for a hearing on the petition.

§291.45. Rates Charged by a Municipality to a District.

(a) A district created pursuant to Texas Constitution, Article XVI, Section 59, which district is located within the corporate limits or the extraterritorial jurisdiction of a municipality and which receives water or sewer service or whose residents receive water or sewer service from the municipality may by filing a petition with the commission appeal the rates charged by the municipality if the resolution, ordinance, or agreement of the municipality consenting to the creation of the district required the district to purchase water or sewer service from the municipality.

(b) The commission shall hear the appeal de novo and the municipality shall have the burden of proof to establish that the rates are just and reasonable.

(c) After the commission establishes just and reasonable rates, the municipality may not increase those rates without approval of the commission. A municipality desiring to increase rates must provide the commission with updated information in a format specified in the current rate data package developed by the Rates Section.

Amendments to §291.41

Date Adopted: December 6, 1995

Date Filed with the Secretary of State: December 20, 1995

Date Published in the Texas Register: January 2, 1996
Date Effective: January 10, 1996